

# 2 Evil Ey

**The creepy combination of George (Night Of The Living Dead) Romero and Dario (Suspiria) Argento brings us Two Evil Eyes, this month's Video World Classic. Now pay attention pupils (get it?) as we open your eyes to the horrors in store...**

The first time Italian horror favourite Dario Argento joined forces with Pittsburgh's zombie expert George Romero, the result was a masterpiece of macabre movie mayhem called *Dawn Of The Dead*. That was directed by George and produced by Dario, who also had a hand in the script. So when horror fans heard that the two sultans of screen splatter were teaming up again to bring us *Two Evil Eyes*, a twin creeps special based on the stories of Edgar Allan Poe, well, they were over the tomb, I mean, moon...

As it happened, *Two Evil Eyes* took a long time to arrive in our local video shops, thanks to various distribution wrangles, and when it did turn up, many fans were disappointed with certain aspects of the production. Why, for example, had Romero and Argento chosen to adapt Poe stories that were already over-familiar from the Corman pictures of the 60s? Corman's atmospheric 1963 *Tales Of Terror* included both stories, and another one as well!

But a second viewing of the movie (which we recommend) reveals it to be a



great deal more enjoyable than the Corman production, and though the Romero segment is a little dull and somewhat like a television movie, the Argento story is a likely candidate for classic status - grim, gory, and unforgettable.

In case you haven't seen it, *Two Evil Eyes* consists of two short adaptations of tales by Edgar Allan Poe, with no connecting story to link them together. The first segment, Romero's is based on 'The Facts In The Case Of M. Valdemar,' while Argento's contribution was inspired by 'The Black Cat.'

In the first story, rich old Ernest

Valdemar (Bingo O'Malley) is dying. His much younger wife, Jessica (Adrienne Barbeau) and his private physician, Dr Hoffman (Ramy Zada) are lovers and have concocted a plan to liquidate Valdemar's assets so that when he dies they will be free to live it up without having to wait for his will to be probated. Using a metronome, Hoffman, a mesmerist, hypnotises Valdemar and compels him to sign over his estate to Jessica, bit by bit. Valdemar's lawyer (EG Marshall) is

suspicious, but can prove nothing. Only Valdemar's premature death could spoil the crafty couple's set-up - and of course, wouldn't you know it, the old man goes ahead and dies...

Jessica and Hoffman decide to conceal Valdemar's body in a freezer and forge his signature on additional documents, but the gruesome task unnerves Jessica. Even more problematic is the fact that Valdemar died under hypnosis, and though his body is dead, his soul is suspended in a limbo between life and death. Able to speak to Hoffman, he makes alarming references to "others" who are with him, spirits who



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intend to use his body to seek revenge in the world of the living. The lovers' plan starts to unravel at this point, and they both suffer a terrible retribution for their sins - Jessica is confronted by the spirits and forced to kill herself, while Hoffman flees to a hotel and is pursued by an army of faceless creatures who creep up on him while he sleeps...

In the second tale, crime photographer Rod Usher (Harvey Keitel) revels in the ugly, the violent and the bizarre. His photographs of crime scenes have made him notorious, and his new book, *Metropolitan Horrors* is about to be published. Things are going well until his girlfriend Annabel (Madeleine Potter),



a violinist, brings home a black cat. She adores the creature, but it irritates Usher. Finally, in a fit of temper, he kills the animal. When Annabel finds out and becomes upset, Usher kills her too, then walls up her body behind the bookcase. What he doesn't realise is that he has walled up his lover's corpse with a cat that looks exactly like the one he had killed. Despite Usher's careful attempts to explain Annabel's

disappearance, the neighbours are suspicious and call the police, who find the corpse - half-eaten by the litter of kittens born behind the wall. Usher kills the two policemen, but is brought to justice in a freak accident engineered by - you guessed it - the black cat!

In addition to the *can't miss* pairing of Argento and Romero, the film also offers the make-up expertise of Tom Savini, the guy who gave us such gut-crunchers as *Dawn Of The Dead*, *Friday The 13th* and *The Burning*. Savini also makes a memorable guest appearance in the Argento episode, playing a nutty chap who pulls out all of his girlfriend's teeth with a pair of pliers!

Each director wrote his own screenplay (Argento with Franco Ferrini), but both obviously had problems fleshing out the source material. Poe's stories tend to be short, and often little more than mood pieces. Romero's tale is largely concerned with the mechanics of Jessica and Hoffman's scheme - all new material, with no basis in Poe's story - and its eye-for-an-eye ending is logical but unsurprising. Argento's







*Berenice* (the teeth-pulling scene). But once again the central thread of the story is conventional: Usher kills his girlfriend, tries to get away, but can't escape poetic justice.

Strangely enough, Argento's usual visual flamboyance doesn't seem to be very much in evidence here, as if working in America dampened his enthusiasm for experimentation. Or more likely he was awed by the subject matter. In an interview near the time of the film's release he stated his reasons for tackling the project:

"I like the story. I know it has been done before, many times, by filmmakers I admire like Roger Corman. But today, for the fifth time we make the story famous. I wanted to make something different, more up to date. Edgar Allan Poe is always presented in the past, while here we brought the story to modern times. It is a softer picture than I usually make. It is more soft and sensual. We actually got compliments from the censor - which is terrible. I like to have more blood, but Edgar Allan Poe is classic..."

Since completing *Two Evil Eyes*, George Romero has directed a movie version of Stephen King's *The Dark Half*, the distribution of which has been held up by the financial collapse of its production company, Orion. Argento, on the other hand has been busy shooting *Trauma*, a terrifying tale about a young girl (played by his daughter, Asia Argento) who is stalked by the maniac who lopped off her parents' heads! We'll have an exclusive report on that in next month's Sneak Preview, but in the meantime why not trot down to your local video store and check this one out again - a second viewing may open your eyes to its macabre merits!



installment, on the other hand, is packed with allusions to Poe stories from *The Pit And The Pendulum* (in one scene Keitel arrives to photograph a naked woman who has been gruesomely sliced in half by a pendulum) to the little-known

